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Another Shot

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His knuckles were white against the blue of the glass. Work had worn him thin, and by now the bartender knew him by name. His firm had lost another employee. The workload was getting bigger, but no new faces came through the door.

“Thank God it’s Friday, right?” The bartender set another little blue glass next to his empty one. “On the house. You look damn exhausted.”

He grimaced and thanked the bartender. Glancing down the length of the bar, he reached for his glass. Suddenly, he paused. A noise. Something long gone. Something familiar. He looked down the bar again and noticed a figure. Ruined blonde hair. The black rim of glasses. She pleaded with the bartender, a pack of cigarettes in her hand. Rolling his eyes, he turned back to his drink. He knew her. Then the noise of her begging stopped with a quick squeal.

Almost growling, he glared down the bar. But now, another figure was in his way. Her dark brown hair trailed down her back in a braid. Her. Quickly looking back at his glass, he let his thoughts wander over messy hotel sheets. He raised his hand at the bartender. A short exchange later and another glass sat between his hands. He met her here. A few years ago, when one of her friends was having a bad night. Somehow, in her misery, her friend had worked up a trick to exchange numbers. He couldn’t remember when she officially moved in with him. Did she? Scouring his memories, he rummaged through good mornings and hot showers. Warm nights by the fire and sunlit breakfasts. Then slowly it became late nights and cold dinners.

He took another swig. Another glass. The details were fuzzy, but he remembered smoothing packets of reports more than her smooth skin. He wanted that promotion so badly. Soon she was never awake when he got home. The arguments were more heated than the bed. She started going out on Fridays, while he would get takeout in front of his work computer.

Some drunk guy brushed past him and he brought himself back to the little blue glass in front of him. It was the same blue. Another memory. She had made dinner, a lucky night when he was coming home at a decent time on Friday, and she was sitting at the table in a deep twilight dress. Her hair was pulled to one side, curled. A little purse on the table. A bigger bag at her feet. They sat at the table together, and she dished up some of the dinner for him. His eyes asked her if she was eating. Her eyes said *no*.

“I’m going out.” He nodded. “I’m not coming back.” He nodded.

She had left without another word, another kiss. Gripping the little blue glass, he studied it, reminiscing about the swish of her dress when he had turned to watch her go. “I nodded.”

“Hm? What’s that?” The bartender looked up from his dishes.

“I nodded! I fucking nodded!” he said and threw a glance self-consciously down the bar. He didn’t want her to hear.

“I see.” Glancing down at his hands, the bartender sighed. “What did you nod at?”

He ran his hands through his hair. “When she was leaving me.” He stared at the braid down the bar. The light swing reminded him of her easy smile and the times they used to sway together when it rained.

“Ah.”

He looked back and noticed the bartender had watched his gaze. He moved the little glass aside next to his pile. Watching the bartender study the collection of shot glasses, he waited for the older man to say something.

“Well, boy, do you want another shot?”

Emily Kienzle recently graduated from Iowa State with a degree in English and two minors in French and Business. She plans to work her way into the editing and publishing field as a young adult fiction editor where she will spend her days reading and writing.